Annual Report of the Committee on infidelity presented September 1st 1836

The Christian religion admits of no compromise with any other system of belief - It sets up its claims to the exclusion of all others and ~~pronounces~~ declares that the believers in every other religion are in the road to ruin and that the only hope for them is to renounce their belief to embrace its doctrines and practice its precepts - It represents man as a fallen being destitute of all holiness and in such a condition as to be entirely unable to help himself - All of which doctrines are repugnant to the feelings of the natural man - Whilst other religions fall in with the natural current of the human heart and only seek to direct its streams into their own channels which take the same direction with it, Christianity demands that those streams should be turned in the very opposite direction of that which they would naturally follow - It demands upon pain of eternal death that the world shall renounce all that it is accustomed to call good and seek its happiness in things for which it has no taste. Such being the nature of the human heart and such the requirements of the Christian religion it would be a matter of astonishment if we did not find some yea even many in a country like ours, where men are encouraged to think for themselves where every

belief is tolerated, who would refuse to give their assent to a religion which condemned almost every act of their lives = During the last century infidelity was so successfully attacked and so repeatedly driven from the field of contest that the world had such a horrid exemplification of its effects upon society in the example of the French nation that the voice of the infidel was for during the last few years almost hushed to silence. Men were generally afraid to come out openly and avow themselves as its advocates - Notwithstanding this there was doubtless much latent infidelity within our boundaries as may be seen by the insinuations and concealed efforts of many publick men who were endeavoring to sap the very foundations of Christianity - Finding it impracticable to come out openly and attack its principles they profess to receive it as a whole whilst in fact they denied all its essential parts = They advanced doctrines which if carried out to their full extent they knew would overthrow the truth of the bible yet when told that this must be the effect they would disavow any such intention Thus many of the unwary were led into infidelity by degrees who would have shuddered at the thought at the outset However during the year that has just passed they have been more open in the avowal of their sentiments They have organized themselves into bodies which meet regularly once a week in most of the large cityes of the north and have appointed lecturers whose chief object is to attack the foundations and abuse the

doctrines of Christianity They appropriated to themselves the name of moral philanthropists, We have been told by gentlemen who attended their meetings during the last winter in New York and Philadelphia that their congregations were large and respectable composed chiefly of young gentlemen and ladies. It is difficult to determine from their writings or lectures in these places what is the exact system of belief which they hold. They were represented by some as Atheists by others as deists. The only thing requisite to an admission into their body is a denial of the truth of the bible So far as we can gather from the few publications which they have sent forth to the world on the subject of their belief they generally deny the accountability of man for any of his actions and say that he is a mere machine formed to act in accordance with the propensities which are given him by nature. They contend that physical good which they call pleasure is the rule of virtue and physical evil which is pain is the rule of vice. That course of conduct then which on the whole tends to produce the greatest amount of physical good or pleasure is virtuous whilst that which on the whole tends to produce an overbalance of pain or physical evil is vicious. They were attacked during the early part of the winter by Dr Sleigh of England and according to the representation of all but avowed infidels entirely routed and driven from the field of argu-

They then assailed his moral character. The developement of facts relating to his history both in England and in this country confirm the opinion that he has been to say the least quite an imprudent man He was the founder of the western hospital in London and was at that time in high repute amongst the chief men of that nation but in consequence of alledged mismanagement of the pecuniary affairs of the Hospital he was condemned by the highest Tribunal of the nation and dismissed from his office in the institution He then came to America and paid a visit to the west. During his stay at Cincinatti through the intrigues of some of his enemies the Campbellites whome he had opposed in a publick debate he was imprisoned for the pretended crime of defrauding a young Lady who came over from England with him of the sum of 1800 $ which sum he acknowledged he received from her but denied that it was due for many months after she claimed it. He then returned to New York and delivered lectures on infidelity and in the latter city he was first challenged the infidels to a publick debate since that time he has held a publick discussion in Phil= From the fact that he was as it were identified with the cause of religion a committee was appointed to examine into

his previous history which after a patient examination of all the evidence within their power reports it to be their conviction that his character has been greatly slandered and that he has never been guilty of any thing farther than imprudence in the management of his fiscal concerns. The infidels still claim the victory over him in the discussion of the following points 1st That the bible sanctions the most horrid and detestable crimes such as incest in the children of our first parents, polygamy in the cases of David and Solomon and many other ancient Israelites; lying in the case in which the bible represents God as inquiring for a lying spirit to go forth and persuade Ahab to go into battle and perish and when a spirit of this sort presented itself the Lord said to it go also where God is represented as putting a lying spirit into the mouths of Ahabs prophets and where Ezekiel makes God to say: I the Lord have deceived that prophet. From these and various other cases they adduce they have proved and the Dr has not been able to vindicate God from the charge that the bible represents God as sanctioning and even committing the most detestable crimes. 2nd That according to a position assumed by the Dr and christianity generally that man does not possess any ability or intuitive principle by which he is capable of knowing what is right or wrong it is impossible for him to show how

the heathen can be accountable for their crimes seeing they have not that light which is indispensible to the knowledge of duty. Upon some of the other points of debate the more candid part of the infidels acknowledge that they were beaten. As much As all the arguments used in this discussion were borrowed from Thomas Paine, as a debt of gratitude to his memory shortly afterwards they celebrated his birth day by a publick dinner in the city of New York. The infidels of Boston prior to this time seem to have been of a somewhat different stamp from those of N.Y. or Phil= They had retained the old system of Spinoza or at least parts of it. Abner Kneeland editor of the Boston investigator to which he may be has six thousand subscribers most of whom believe with him gives their creed in the following language= "we believe in the existence of a universe of suns and planets among which there is one sun belonging to our planetary system and that other suns being more remote are called stars: but that they are indeed suns to other planetary systems. We believe that the whole universe is nature and that the word nature embraces the whole universe, and that God and nature so far as we can attach any rational idea to either are perfectly synonomous terms= Hence we are not atheists but pantheists that is instead of believing

there is no God we believe in the abstract that all is God and that all power that is, is in God and there is no power except that which proceeds from God - we believe that there can be no will or intelligence where there is no sense and no sense where there are no organs of sense and hence sense will and intelligence are the effect and not the cause of of organization = we believe in all that logically results from these premises whether good bad or indifferent = Hence we believe that God is all in all: that it is in him that we live and move and have our being: and that the whole duty of man consists in living as long as he can and in promoting as much happiness as he can while he lives As was remarked by this creed by one of the writers not very friendly to christianity & Mr Buchanan and he has followers treads their God under foot every time they walk, eat and drink of him at every meal and commit many other outrages upon him in ways almost unimaginable - some parts of his God must be very wicked so that the worshipping must be considerd worshippers His deity must have a variety of opinions and very few parts of him appeared to be at all conscious that they are God

He is the only one of all the infidels within our county so far as we can learn who has come out openly and given his creed of religious or philosophical belief to the world = Is it not true that any man can find followers no matter how absurd the doctrines he may advocate we should be utterly astonished to find that one holding such sentiments as those expressed in the foregoing would meet with the least encouragement in an enlightened community = yet if we are to place the least confidence in his assertions his followers are increasing rapidly almost every day. They have a sunday Lyceum in Boston of which Mr Kneeland is one of the regular lecturers = as a specimen of the subjects treated of we give the following for last sabbath. In the afternoon the lecturer was to show the why and wherefore it is that many of the most learned clergy and other members of churches have given up all ~~belief~~ pretensions to a belief in the bible as a revelation from God and have become free enquirers = in the evening he was to show critically to inquire into some of the pretended miracles of Christ particularly the cursing a barren fig tree for not having figs on it out of season: They have a library and book store connected with the Lyceum in which are to be found all the celebrated works on infidelity = They have opened the liberal sum of

$1000 to any clergyman theological association or other body of men who will give to the world a complete refutation of the work called Mirabeaus system of nature or laws of the moral and physical world. This is the ablest work they ever written against the dogmas of priestcraft. Unfortunately they have omitted to mention who is to be the judge of this complete refutation and who will say the libraries of the time when it is produced. (In the Southern and western portion of our country) we have no means of ascertaining the extent of infidelity. They are no organized bodies here and your committee have heard of no attempts to deliver publish lectures in any place except (in) the Yondam Miss Fanny Wright ~~a free lecture partook~~ ~~was represented rather as a political than infidel lecture~~ and her lecture is represented as partaking rather of politicks than of infidelity since that time she left the west and has made some unsuccessfull attempts to lecture in the north. It is true that there are three or four papers in the west which openly advocate infidelity but their circulation is said to be very limited. One of these is established at Pittsburg is called the Pittsburg Manufacturer it was formerly an advocate

of Romanism one in Ohio called the Ohio Catholic
-man and one in New Harmony Indiana conducted
by Robert Dale Owen. They have been making efforts
to establish one at St. Louis one a monthly periodical
in Ohio but we have not been able to learn what
success has attended their efforts. Not having had
access to any of their publications we are not able to
state with any degree of accuracy the progress
the cause is making in this section of our country.
The infidels of the north and east have formed a
company holding their own sentiments who are to go out in
a body to some part of the west and settle together
so that they may be (to use their own language) a kind
of nucleus from which much moral and intellectual
light will be radiated by the dissemination of their
valuable publications. To aid them in this noble enter-
-prise they have established a society at Phil called the
the liberal union for the publication of all such libera
works as the bigotry of the age have suppressed. The
funds are to be raised by the sale of stock at 1 per share.
The agent in his reports says should the stock continue
to sell as fast for a year or two as it has since the
organization of the society it will soon be an effectual
counterpoise to the A S Union Tract and Missionary Society
especially in our western country.

A Knecland in remarking upon some statisticks given in Zions Herald from which the number of infidels in the U. S. is estimated at 100,000 says we suspect there are at least 10 times that number though comparatively speaking there are but few who are organized into societys but they can act as efficiently at the polls as though they were= All are aware of the national convention held at Saratoga on the first of August for the purpose of bringing about a union of sentiment and concert of action amongst infidels throughout the Union. We have been told by a gentleman present that this convention consisted of 12 or 15 self constituted delegates it resulted in the formation of a society called the United States moral and philosophical society for the general diffusion of useful knowledge, They adopted a constitution and appointed a board of managers whose duty is thus defined by the const. They shall expend all money belonging to the society for the benefit of the same in procuring the publishing of such books pamphlets tracts or papers as may in their opinion advance the objects of the society and in paying agents for circulating the same and for collecting funds for the society. This society is to hold its annual meeting hereafter on the third monday of september: They have addressed a circular to their fellow citizens in which they express their firm conviction

that the labors which they have just closed will become
in conducing to the well being and happiness of mankind
become in importance only to our ever memorable declaration
of Independance. In conclusion we would say that
although perhaps infidelity has not increased to a very
alarming extent during the past year yet it has
become much more bolder and open than it has been
in years previous that are past. It is now sending forth its
publications weekly to every part of our land from
9 different presses = And as it comes under the insp-
-iring name of liberty and liberality it is greatly to be
feared that it will present many attractions to a
people like ours which many other dangerous forms
error now extant do not possess. We would call
upon our brethren and all who love our holy
religion and our country to prepare well to meet
the enemy under whatever form he may appear
It may be that the Lord (although we are sure
that his truth shall finally triumph) is now about
to permit infidelity to come in upon us like a
flood and blessed will be he who shall be
able to withstand the enemy and put him to
flight in the day of conflict